

LEVEL
ONE

News Sheet of the American Branch of the Anglican Society

OCTOBER, 1942

The Article following is part of a lecture delivered last summer at the Wellesley Conference. Those who know what the liturgical situation is in our Church will agree that there is urgent need for a "new reformation."—C. E. H.

SOME LITURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

BY THE REV. F. W. FITTS

I.

The following notes are made concerning the use of the Choir Offices and the Holy Liturgy as these services are appointed in The Book of Common Prayer, together with some suggestions for changes and enrichment which seem desirable when the time comes for further revision.

Ceremonial will only be considered in a few instances and in a general way. None of the Prayer Book services can be conducted without some ceremonial. The rubrics give a few ceremonial directions, which so far as they go should be obeyed. But in services conducted in the simplest manner many things beyond the directions given have to be done by way of what is called utilitarian ceremonial. Neither do the rubrics meet the requirements of the growing appreciation and desire for enrichment of the services by way of interpretive and symbolic ceremonial, though they do not prohibit such enrichment.

To supply the needed utilitarian ceremonial and little or much interpretive and symbolic ceremonial, common sense and custom come to our aid. Common sense should deter us from introducing ceremonial made up by the parson according to his predilections and idiosyncrasies, while both loyalty to our own communion as well as common sense should lead us to follow Anglican tradition and not to look to a foreign communion for guidance.

Customs have crept in among us which are not according to liturgical principles. One which applies both to the Choir Offices and the Holy Liturgy is the so called "processional" with hymns before and after services while the choir and clergy are entering and leaving the chancel. These are not true processions, and moreover when used before the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer such hymns make unmeaning the Versicle and Response, "O Lord open Thou our lips," "And our mouth shall show forth Thy praise," soon to follow the hymn. The opening of these services is meant to be quiet, while the congregation realizes the presence of God by the reading of one or more of the sentences of Holy Scripture appointed, and sometimes followed by the General Confession, Absolution and Lord's Prayer; then after these, or immediately after the Sentence or Sentences comes the first burst of praise introduced by the Ver-

sicle and Response, "O Lord open Thou our lips," etc. Both clergy and choirmasters sometimes say that on the processional or opening hymn depends the heartiness of the whole service, a sort of "whoop-it-up" device to wake up and enthuse the congregation, which is entirely contrary to the spirit of true worship.

For the Choir Offices not much guidance is needed beyond what the Prayer Book provides, but it is amazing how little use is made of some new provisions of the recent revision. Since 1892 we the offices to begin with the opening Sentence and omitting the have made use of the rubric which under certain conditions allows General Confession, etc., to pass at once to the Lord's Prayer preceded by the Salutation, "The Lord be with you," etc. A new rubric of 1928, however, provides a much better way when the General Confession is not to be said, viz., to pass at once from the opening Sentence to the Versicle, "O Lord open Thou our lips," etc., omitting the Lord's Prayer here and causing it to be said in its ancient place after the Apostles' Creed and the Salutation, "The Lord be with you," etc., and the bidding, "Let us pray." This provision corrects the mistake made in the first American Prayer Book where compilers while quite properly desiring to retain in the Offices the saying of the Lord's Prayer but once instead of twice, as in the English Prayer Book, deleted the Pater Noster which held the better liturgical place and retained the one at the opening of the Offices. The placing of the Lord's Prayer at the opening of the daily Offices in the English Prayer Book was a carrying over from the Breviary the requirements of saying the Lord's Prayer secretly before the office proper began.

Regarding the Canticles, the *Te Deum* presents problems. It is almost a service in itself in the form given in the Prayer Book, ending with a group of suffrages. Originally it consisted of the first two sections only. The third section seems to have been added in the sixth century. As a hymn of praise following the First Lesson in Morning Prayer it would be an improvement if restored to its original form. On account of its great length it becomes wearisome if used Sunday after Sunday, or day after day, and especially when it is usurped by the choir as an anthem while the congregation mutely stands, shifting from one foot to the other. It would not be so wearying if the congregation joined in singing it with the choir, and for the deeper reason of corporate worship it is to be hoped that some competent and devout musician will be inspired to compose a setting for it suited to congregational singing, which might become universally sung throughout the Church. When read, the *Te Deum* is a more worshipful act if recited by all in unison straight through as the *Gloria Excelsis* is usually recited. It would seem wise to reserve the *Te Deum* for use on festivals and in festal seasons. An old rule directs its omission during Lent. Parsons and Jones in their interesting Note on the *Te Deum* in their recent book, "The American Prayer Book," say: "This Hymn, by common consent the climax of devotional inspiration outside Holy Scripture, is nothing less than a paraphrase of the Liturgy. As far as mere impassioned words can go, apart from the sacrificial action of the Eucharist, it is a Liturgy in itself. Following the order of the early Eastern Church, it contains a Preface and Sanctus; a Post-Sanctus praising God for his revelation under both dispensations, leading to an account of the Incarnation and Redemption; and in conclusion properly liturgical intercessions for the Benefit thereof."

It is most desirable that all the Canticles should be sung by all the congregation either to chants or other simple settings, and not become show-off pieces for the choir. Where singers are competent an anthem after the Third Collect and perhaps at the collection of offerings may profitably be listened to by the congregation,

if allowed to sit for meditation, but with less pretentious choirs it is wiser to use hymns at these points in the service. Time at choir practices will accordingly be gained for achieving greater perfection in rendering the canticles, responses and hymns so as the better to lead and support the congregation.

By a right intuition, in the majority of parishes, the Jubilate, Cantate, Bonum Est, Deus Misereatur and Benedic, are not generally used, but rather the Gospel Canticles which stress the Incarnation. The Benedictus, Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis, have for centuries been respectively the morning, evening and bed-time hymns of Western Christendom. With the Venite and Psalter preceding, then a lesson from the Old Testament following, to say or sing the above listed Psalms or parts of Psalms as Canticles, somewhat overweights the offices with Old Testament material. It would be a help to strangers and others in finding the places in the offices if they were omitted in another revision.

The Psalter, however, needs much more thought than has been given it. Originally it was considered the heart of the daily offices, the chief object of which was the recitation of the Book of Psalms once through each week, with fixed Psalms for certain services each day, and the remainder divided over the seven days, Psalms 1-110 assigned to Mattins and 111-150 to Vespers, omitting those designated as fixed Psalms in the other six offices. This arrangement causes the same Psalms to be recited at Mattins and Vespers every Sunday, and Monday and so on through the week. Our present rules for the use of the Psalter are so very elastic that too often it is reduced to one short Psalm, and with the result that the people never take part in saying or singing many of the Psalms, or at least not very often. This reduction of the Psalter not only ignores the original purpose of the Divine Office or Hours of Prayer, but also deprives the people of a very important source of devotion which happily links Christian and Jewish worship in classic forms of praise, aspiration and prayer. The arrangement for special Psalms for Sundays is a step in the right direction. The old arrangement of the whole Psalter covering Morning and Evening Prayer for the days of the month is rather mechanical and often brings less desirable Psalms for Sundays. Something might be gained from study of the Breviary. We should not want the same Psalms for every Sunday at Morning and Evening Prayer as provided in the Breviary Mattins and Vespers, but it might be desirable to take twenty of the most desirable Psalms and divide them over the four or five Sundays of the month, two for each office. Thus 16 of them repeated 12 times a year, and 4 of them (used on the 5th Sunday, when it occurred) repeated 4 times a year, on Sundays, the people would get to know the choicest Psalms almost as well as they know the Venite. To these two appointed Psalms for both the Sunday offices, a third Psalm might be added at the discretion of the minister, or the best remaining Psalms might be divided over the 52 Sundays. This would ensure the use of 104 more Psalms and with the 20 fixed Psalms for the Sundays of the month, would give a total of 124, leaving 26 unused on Sundays, which would probably be a conservative elimination of the undesirable Psalms for Sunday worship. This or some similar arrangement for fixed Psalms for each Sunday of the month might make possible an increase in the singing of the Psalter at least at Evensong. We should surely keep our present selections of Psalms for festivals, Saints' Days, and the Church seasons, which could easily be combined with the arrangement for two fixed Psalms for their Sundays of the month, when the various seasons occurred or when festivals fall on a Sunday. In those Churches and Chapels where the offices are read daily, for the remaining days of the week and month, there probably is no better arrangement than our present one of divid-

ing the Psalms over the days of the month, especially now that it is possible to omit such Psalms or portions of Psalms as are not edifying for public worship. A very practical consideration concerning the Psalter and in fact all of the canticles excepting the Te Deum is the due observance of the asterisk placed in the middle of each verse. This useful signal is intended not only as a help when the Psalms and Canticles are sung, but also when they are read. In the first place they mark the balanced construction of Hebrew poetry. The structure of both Gregorian and Anglican chants observes this break in the verse by a prolongation of the last notes of each half of the chant, and for the necessity of taking breath. Likewise in reading, a decided pause should be made at the asterisk rest not only for marking the poetical construction, but for the very practical help it gives in keeping the congregation together in the recitation, and preventing undue haste.

If the clergy and people would learn to read the Psalms and Canticles a bit more slowly than is the regrettable custom in too many places, and if the pause was made at the asterisk, a great gain would ensue to these portions of the choir offices when read.

A further help to the rendition of the Psalter is to sit for their singing or recitation, and to sing or read them antiphonally, dividing the verses between the two sides of the choir and the congregation, and treating the Glorias as two additional verses of the Psalm. It adds much interest, zest and beauty to the service.

One ceremonial provision was restored to the offices at the last revision, of which many of the clergy seem to be ignorant, either of its existence or its eminent propriety, viz., the slight change in the Rubric following the Creed where now instead of saying, as formerly, "All devoutly kneeling," it says, "The People devoutly kneeling." This restoration complies with the ancient principle that the normal posture of the officiant is to stand for all prayers except confession of sin. (In the Holy Liturgy there is also the exception of the Prayer of Humble Access.)

The Liturgy is a possible exception as it has come to be said kneeling since the almost lost custom of saying it in procession, has come about. But even when said or sung kneeling, when the Lord's Prayer is reached, the priest should stand and remain standing through the suffrages and prayer following (if the whole Litany is used) then kneeling again at the antiphon, "O Lord arise help us," etc., and standing again at the final Versicle and Response and closing prayer.

(To Be Continued)